



## OPEN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS ASSOCIATION

### Central Executive Committee (CEC)

19 – 21 October 2018

### NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY (N S S) UPDATE AND DISCUSSION

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The CEC is asked to:-

- i) **note** the update
- ii) **comment** on the results
- iii) **discuss** next steps
- iv) **note** that Appendices 2 and 3 are confidential to CEC members

## 1. Background

- 1.1 The annual results of the N S S were published at the end of July, and there has been a [magazine article](#) discussing our results, and a [piece on the website](#) concerning the university's results.
- 1.2 The results showed a small improvement for both the Association and the University, but for both, they remain below where one might wish them to be; there is no room for complacency for either of us.
- 1.3 For context, the results for 2017 were discussed and addressed in CEC papers in [October 2017](#) and [January 2018](#).
- 1.4 This paper will focus on the Students Association results; a further discussion and information document on the university's results will be uploaded to the forum for further discussion there.

## 2. The Students Association Question results

- 2.1 This is the second year in which the current format question on satisfaction with the students' union has been used. The question is number 26 on the survey and says:  
*"The students' union (association or guild) effectively represents students' academic interests".*

2.2 Our overall results for 2017 and 2018 are shown in the table below:-

	Definitely agree	Mostly agree	Neither	Mostly disagree	Definitely disagree	Not applicable	Total responses	Sample size	% response rate
2017	17%	26%	51%	3%	2%	2691	12121	27871	43.5%
2018	18%	28%	49%	4%	2%	2113	10054	23300	43.2%

*NB: The percentage figures for the ratings are given as a percentage of those who regarded the question as “applicable”*

- 2.3 The figure that NSS use for benchmarking – the figure that is quoted as our “score” – is found by adding the “definitely agree” and “mostly agree” percentages, giving us our score of 46% for this year and 44% (which is not 17 + 26, but rounding effects come in) for last year. This could be thought of as the percentage of those who expressed an opinion who thought we were doing a decent job of academic representation.
- 2.4 Another figure of interest is the total of the “disagree” percentages – those who felt we were definitely not doing a decent job on this. This gives 6% for this year and 5% for last year, which is unfortunate - although given we are talking about in the region of 476 students in 2018 versus 472 students in 2017, probably not worth thinking it is symptomatic of a massive decline.
- 2.5 In addition the NSS offers a breakdown by subject area (Appendix 1). This has limitations; not all subjects have results shown and some sample sizes are very small. This means that substantial changes year-on-year (as in, for example, geographical sciences) may be simply a fluctuation due to the individuals involved. Additionally, the subject descriptions do not always align well to OU degree titles so our understanding of these could be impeded by that.
- 2.6 If we focus on subjects with substantial cohort sizes (over 800, say) such as history, humanities, politics, psychology, engineering, mathematics, “other biosciences”, “non-specific physical sciences”, education and “combined, general or negotiated studies”, we can see an improvement from 2017-2018, with the exception of mathematics.
- 2.7 Despite the limitations as discussed above (and many more could readily be added), these figures could give us useful information on particular areas in which our reach is low.
- 2.8 We also have access to results broken down by various other criteria (gender, ethnicity, disability etc.); these are not available to the public and are given for CEC information and discussion in Appendix 2, which is confidential.
- 2.9 Comparisons with other institutions are obviously problematic due to our difference. Out of all institutions, our score put us 361<sup>st</sup> out of 441.
- 2.10 However, it may be of interest to compare our 2018 results with those of Arden and Kaplan, although obviously their cohorts are much smaller:

	Definitely agree	Mostly agree	Neither	Mostly disagree	Definitely disagree	Not applicable	Total responses	Sample size	% response rate
OU	18%	28%	49%	4%	2%	2113	10054	23300	43.20%
Arden	13%	26%	52%	6%	4%	15	104	236	44.07%
Kaplan	21%	23%	52%	2%	2%	11	48	84	57.14%

2.11 Kaplan's figures, of course, look outstanding! Though they do have only 84 eligible to respond, only 48 who did so, of whom 37 expressed a view, so their "definitely agree" corresponds to 4 students.

### 3. Supplementary questions results relevant to the Students Association

3.1 Universities can opt to ask additional questions, on top of the core questions that all students answer. These results are not in the public domain; they are given for CEC information and discussion in Appendix 3, which is confidential as the information is not in the public domain.

### 4. Other relevant questions

4.1 Although only question 26 of the core questions specifically asks about the Students Association, other questions, such as those on Student Voice and one of those on Community, also have relevance to what we do. The results of these for 2017 and 2018 are summarised below.

	% agree		% disagree		% response		Sample size	
	17	18	17	18	17	18	17	18
<b>Question 21: I feel part of a community of staff and students</b>	52%	53%	23%	23%	52.0%	51.1%	27871	23300
<b>Question 23: I have had the right opportunities to provide feedback on my course</b>	75%	74%	10%	10%	52.2%	51.1%	27871	23300
<b>Question 24: Staff value students' views and opinions about the course</b>	64%	64%	8%	8%	51.1%	50.0%	27871	23300
<b>Question 25: It is clear how students' feedback on the course has been acted upon</b>	38%	40%	20%	18%	49.5%	48.3%	27871	23300

### 5. Where next?

5.1 Work on increasing awareness of the Association and our work has been ongoing for some time. A problem with the understanding of the term "academic representation" has also been highlighted.

5.2 The CEC are invited to consider next steps!

**Cath Brown**  
President